

19. The universal signature object of claim 18 wherein the additional signature data is selected from the group comprising:

one of the versions of the digital data;

the universal signature object, prior to inclusion of the additional digital signature;

a hash of one of the versions of the digital data; and

a hash of the universal signature object, prior to inclusion of the additional digital signature.

20. The universal signature object of claim 18 wherein the additional digital signature is timestamped.

21. The universal signature object of claim 18 further comprising:

a public key corresponding to the private key used to generate the additional digital signature.

22. The universal signature object of claim 1 further comprising:

use-permission information regarding permitted use of the universal signature object.

23. The universal signature object of claim 1 wherein the universal signature object is compressed.

24. The universal signature object of claim 1 wherein the universal signature object is encrypted.

25. The universal signature object of claim 1 further comprising:

a universal-signature-object viewer for utilizing the universal signature object.

26. The universal signature object of claim 25 wherein the universal-signature-object viewer for utilizing the universal signature object comprises:
- an application launching means for launching the application compatible with the file format of at least one of the versions; and
  - a viewer means for displaying information concerning the universal signature object.
27. The universal signature object of claim 1 further comprising:
- a signing program for modifying the universal signature object to include an additional digital signature.
28. The universal signature object of claim 1 wherein the application compatible with the file format of at least one of the versions includes said version.
29. A universal-signature-object viewer for utilizing a universal signature object comprising at least one version of digital data, wherein each version has a file format; a digital signature of signature data, wherein the signature data is a function of the digital data; and information concerning an application compatible with the file format of at least one of the versions, the universal-signature-object viewer comprising:
- an application launching means for launching the application compatible with the file format of at least one of the versions; and
  - a viewer means for displaying information concerning the universal signature object.
30. The universal-signature-object viewer of claim 29 wherein the information concerning the universal signature object displayed by the viewer means comprises at least one data field from the group of data fields comprising:
- use-permission information regarding permitted use of the universal signature object;

a list of items contained within the universal signature object;  
at least one version of the digital data;  
a digital signature;  
a name of a signatory of the digital signature;  
a timestamp of the digital signature; and  
digital signature verification results.

31. The universal-signature-object viewer of claim 29 further comprising:  
an edit disabling means for disabling editing capabilities of the application.
32. The universal-signature-object viewer of claim 29 wherein the application launching means searches a computer system on which the universal-signature-object viewer operates to locate the application compatible with the file format of at least one of the versions.
33. The universal-signature-object viewer of claim 29 wherein the information concerning an application compatible with the file format of at least one of the versions comprises an executable file of the application compatible with the file format of at least one of the versions.
34. The universal-signature-object viewer of claim 29 wherein the application compatible with the file format of at least one of the versions operates under the control of the universal-signature-object viewer.
35. The universal-signature-object viewer of claim 29 further comprising:  
a verification means for verifying the digital signature.